

REMARKS

Reconsideration of the above-identified application is respectfully requested. By the present amendment, claims 1-6 have been cancelled and new claims 7-15 have been added. Claims 7-15 are pending in the application.

In the Office Action of January 4, 2001, the Abstract of the Disclosure was objected to because the phrase "in particular" is indefinite. By the present Amendment, the phrase "in particular" has been removed from the Abstract of the Disclosure.

In the Office Action of January 4, 2001, claims 1-6 were rejected based on 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which Applicant regards as the invention. The Office Action stated that the phrase "in particular" renders the claim indefinite because the resulting claim does not clearly set forth the metes and bounds of the patent protection desired. By the present amendment, claims 1-6 have been cancelled and new claims 7-15 have been added. New claims 7-15 do not include the phrase "in particular."

The Office Action also stated that, in claims 5 and 6, there is insufficient antecedent basis for the limitations "said steering wheel" and "said gas bag module." Claims 5 and 6 have been cancelled by the present amendment. Care has been exercised so as not to introduce any improper antecedent basis in new claims 7-15.

The Office Action also stated that claim 1 should be clarified so as to identify the subject matter to which the claim is drawn to, i.e., either the sub-combination of a fastener alone or the combination of a fastener and a gas bag module in a steering wheel. By the present amendment, new claims 7-15 are clearly directed to the combination of a fastener on a gas bag module for connecting the module to a steering wheel.

In the Office Action of January 4, 2001, claims 1, 3 and 4 were rejected as being anticipated under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) by U.S. Patent No. 6,094,785 to Montgomery et al. Claims 1, 3, and 4 have been cancelled by the present amendment. Claim 2 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Montgomery et al in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,138,329 to Johnson. Claim 2 has been cancelled by the present amendment. New claim 7 combines the limitations of previous claims 1 and 2. Therefore, the rejection of previous claim 2 will be addressed as it relates to new claim 7.

New claim 7 recites an apparatus comprising two fastening arms comprising hooks having contact surface areas and a fastener part comprising a concave contact surface. The fastening arms enter into a snap-action connection with the fastener part and clasp the fastener part in a connected condition. The contact surface areas of the fastening arms engage the concave contact surface of the fastener part when in the connected condition. The apparatus also comprises a gas bag module to be connected with a steering wheel. The

fastening arms and the fastener part, when in the connected condition, connect the gas bag module with the steering wheel.

Montgomery discloses a fastening mechanism for connecting two halves of the housing of a mobile telephone. A first half 200 of the housing includes snap hooks 208; a second half 100 of the housing includes protrusions 111. The snap hooks 208 engage the protrusions 111 to connect the first and second halves of the housing. The connection can be broken only by the use of a special removal tool 502. Montgomery does not teach or suggest means by which to connect a gas bag module to a steering wheel.

Johnson discloses a fastening mechanism for re-closable bags. The fastening elements 12 and 22 are not arms but strips that extend along the complete opening of the bag. The strips are made from soft, elastic, materials such that the connection is not too easy or too hard to break. (See column 7, lines 25-43). Thus, the connection can be broken manually, simply by pulling on the panels of the reclosable bag. The cross-section of one of the closure elements 18 of the fastener is arrow-shaped and has concave contact surface areas 106 and 108. Johnson does not teach or suggest means by which to connect a gas bag module to a steering wheel.

It is well settled that, when references are combined to form an obviousness rejection, there must be some motivation or suggestion in the references themselves to combine the teachings disclosed therein. In making a rejection based on obviousness, hindsight is impermissible. The teachings of the prior art must, in and of themselves and without the benefits

of the teaching of the present invention, make the invention as a whole obvious. See In Re Sponnoble, 160 USPQ 237 at 243 (CCPA 1969).

Applicants respectfully submit that there is no motivation or suggestion in Montgomery and Johnson to combine their teachings. Montgomery is directed to a fastener for a cell phone housing and Johnson is directed to a fastener for a reclosable bag. Montgomery teaches connecting housing halves at predetermined locations along the length of the halves wherein the connections can be broken only with a special tool. Johnson teaches a continuous connection of adjacent sheets of material along a length of the sheets wherein the connection can be broken relatively easily. Clearly, there is no motivation or suggestion in the references to combine the teachings of the Montgomery and Johnson.

Applicants further submit that, even if Montgomery and Johnson were combined, their teachings would not make obvious the apparatus recited in new claim 7. As stated above, new claim 7 recites the combination of a gas bag module, and fastening arms and a fastener part for connecting the gas bag module with a steering wheel. Neither Montgomery nor Johnson teaches or suggests means for connecting a gas bag module to a steering wheel. With regard to Montgomery, one having ordinary skill in the art would not consider a fastener for a cellular telephone housing relevant for fastening a gas bag module to a steering wheel. Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that Montgomery provides no motivation or suggestion

to apply the teachings contained therein to the attachment of a gas bag module to a steering wheel.

With regard to Johnson, one having ordinary skill in the art would not consider a re-closable bag relevant for fastening a gas bag module to a steering wheel. First, different materials are used for the gas bag module on the one hand and the fastening elements for the re-closable bags on the other hand. Second, the fastening elements for the re-closable bags consist of elongated strips for making a continuous connection along the length of the bag opening, whereas the gas bag module uses arms for making a connection(s) at predetermined location(s). Finally, an essential requirement of the fastening elements for the re-closable bags is that they allow easy opening of the bags. This is in distinct contrast to the subject invention in which a secure, reliable connection is required. Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that Johnson provides no motivation or suggestion to apply the teachings contained therein to the attachment of a gas bag module to a steering wheel and the rejection should be withdrawn.

For the reasons stated above, it is respectfully submitted that new claim 7 is allowable. New claims 8-11, depending from new claim 7, are therefore allowable at least for the same reasons that new claim 7 is allowable.

In the Office Action of January 4, 2001, claims 5 and 6 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Montgomery in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,333,897 to Landis. Previous claims 5 and 6 have been cancelled by this

amendment. New claims 10 and 11 correspond to previous claims 5 and 6. Therefore, the rejection of previous claims 5 and 6 will be discussed as the rejection relates to new claims 10 and 11.

Claim 10 depends from claim 7 and recites that an assembly comprising the steering wheel and the gas bag module is provided. The fastening arms are connected to the gas bag module and the fastener part is connected to the steering wheel. Claim 11 depends from claim 10 and recites that the fastening arms are configured integrally with the gas bag module and the fastener part is configured integrally with the steering wheel.

As stated above, Montgomery is directed to a fastener for connecting halves of a cell phone housing. Landis is directed to connecting a gas bag module 22 to a steering wheel 10 via pin members 34. The Office Action states that it would have been obvious to one having ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to have the fastener of Montgomery to assemble a gas bag module to a steering wheel to provide easier installation. Applicant strongly disagrees.

The references provide no motivation or suggestion that the fastener disclosed in Montgomery would provide any easier installation of the gas bag module on the steering wheel. Montgomery doesn't even suggest the possibility of using the disclosed connector to connect a gas bag module to a steering wheel. In Landis, the fastener includes the pin member 34, a clip member 50 and a spring 88. Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that Landis teaches away from the integrated

configuration of the connector of the present invention, as well as the connector disclosed in Montgomery.

The only teaching of using the fastener recited in new claims 10 and 11 to provide an easy installment of the gas bag module is found in the teachings of the present invention. Therefore, it is respectfully submitted any motivation or suggestion to combine the teachings of Montgomery and Landis is the product of impermissible hindsight in view of the teachings of the present invention. In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that there is no motivation or suggestion in the references to combine the teachings of the Montgomery and Landis and the rejection should be withdrawn.

For the reasons stated above, it is respectfully submitted that new claims 10 and 11 are allowable as being dependent on an allowable claim (claim 7) as well as for the specific reasons recited therein.

New claim 12 combines the limitations recited in previous claims 1 and 6. Therefore, the rejection of previous claim 6 will be discussed in relation to new claim 12. New claim 12 recites an apparatus comprising a gas bag module including an inflator mount and two fastening arms configured integrally with the inflator mount. The apparatus also comprises a steering wheel including a fastener part configured integrally with the steering wheel. The fastening arms entering into a snap-action connection with the fastener part and clasp the fastener part in a connected condition to connect the gas bag module and the inflator mount with the steering wheel.

Landis discloses a fastening pin that is not configured integrally with the gas bag module or with an inflator mount. Rather, the fastening arms in Landis consist of several parts. (See column 3, lines 29 to 31 and Figure 3). Landis therefore teaches away from an integral configuration of the fastening arms with the gas bag module. Also, in Landis, the fastener part, i.e., the holes 18 in the support plate 14, is not configured integrally with the steering wheel 10, but rather is welded to a frame portion 13 of the hub portion 12 of the steering wheel. (See column 2, line 64 through column 3, line 3).

The advantage of the fastener arms being configured integrally with the inflator mount and the fastener part being configured integrally with the steering wheel is that the fastening elements can be formed during the fabrication of inflator mount and steering wheel. Thus, the number of parts is reduced. Further, the inflator mount carrying the fastener arms and the fastener arms clasping the fastener part allow the connection between gas bag module and steering wheel to be opened from below the steering wheel. Thus, it is not necessary to remove the steering wheel from the steering column to remove the gas bag module.

Landis provides no motivation or suggestion to connect a gas bag module to a steering wheel with fastening arms clasping a fastener part, where the fastening arms are configured integrally with an inflator mount of a gas bag module. In fact, Landis teaches away from such structure.

Therefore, new Claim 12 is not obvious over Montgomery in view of Landis and the rejection should be withdrawn.

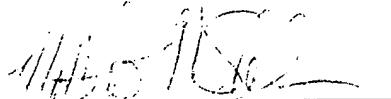
For the reasons stated above, it is respectfully submitted that new claim 12 is allowable. New claims 13-15, depending from new claim 12, are therefore allowable at least for the same reasons that new claim 12 is allowable.

Attached is a marked-up version of the amended claims presented in this Amendment. The attached page is captioned "Version With Markings To Show Changes Made."

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that the above identified application is in condition for allowance, and allowance of the above-identified application is respectfully requested.

Please charge any deficiency or credit any overpayment in the fees for this amendment to our Deposit Account No. 20-0090.

Respectfully submitted,



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VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

IN THE SPECIFICATION:

Please amend the Abstract of the Disclosure as follows:

A fastener, ~~in particular~~ for securing a gas bag module to a steering wheel, ~~comprises~~ includes two fastening arms and a fastener part. The fastening arms enter into a snap-action connection with the fastener part and clasp the fastener part in a connected condition.